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## Forest seeks comments on Darby Lumber Lands project

Ravalli Republic Oct 22, 2018

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The second phase of the Darby Lumber Lands project proposes commercial timber harvest on 1,274 acres, non-commercial thinning on 333 acres and prescribed burning. The Bitterroot Forest is asking for public comment.

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The Bitterroot National Forest has released its Environmental Analysis (EA) on the Darby Lumber Lands Project – Phase 2, and is inviting the public to review and make comments on the proposal.

The vegetation management, fuels reduction, and transportation system project encompasses approximately 27,453 acres in the South Fork Sleeping Child and Rye Creek drainages in the Sapphire Mountains east of Darby.

Phase 1 of the project was completed in 2016 and focused on improving watershed and stream health including reducing chronic sediment from an extensive road system built decades ago for timber management. It also created a sustainable motorized access system and loop-based motorized routes, including 44 miles of connector trails for motorcycle and ATV travel.

Phase 2 is a continuation of the original project and also incorporates vegetation management activities. Objectives of Phase 2 include:

- Design and implement a suitable transportation system for long term land management of the area
- Improve forest health by reducing Douglas fir mistletoe outbreak
- Reduce potential fire severity

- Manage timber to provide forest products, jobs and income to local communities

Proposed treatments include commercial timber harvest on 1,274 acres, non-commercial thinning on 333 acres of dry pine sites, and prescribed burning to improve forest health.

Thinning activities would favor leaving mature Ponderosa Pine occupying the site at historic densities. There are three diseased Douglas fir stands that are proposed for regeneration harvest that would be replanted to Ponderosa Pine after harvest.

The project also proposes changes to access on existing roads and trails, storing and decommissioning unneeded roads and trails, building two new motorized connector trails for ATV travel, and construction of several temporary roads.

The EA is available online at [www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=49700](http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=49700). It is also available for review at the Darby/Sula Ranger District and the supervisor's office in Hamilton.

Public comments specific to this project and/or to individual sites and resources are valuable in helping the Forest Service identify concerns, develop alternatives to the proposed action, and refine the analysis to focus on issues. Comments are due by Nov. 20, 2018.

Submit comments to: Eric Winthers, District Ranger, by one of the following methods; mail: P.O. Box 388, Darby, Montana, 59829, FAX: 406-821-4264, or email: [comments-northern-bitterroot-darby@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-northern-bitterroot-darby@fs.fed.us). Hand delivered comments must be delivered

between 8 a.m. — 4:30 p.m. weekdays, excluding holidays.

Comments should include: 1) name, address, phone number and organization represented, if any; 2) title of the project on which the comments are being submitted; and 3) substantive comments including specific facts and supporting information for the responsible official to consider.

Please put “Comments on Darby Lumber Lands – Phase 2 Project” in the subject line for emailed comments. An automated response will confirm that your electronic comment has been received. All comments are open to public inspection and will be posted to the Forest Service website.

For more information or questions about the project, contact Eric Winthers, Darby/Sula District Ranger at 406-821-3913 or *ewinthers@fs.fed.us*.